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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the changes in the mainstreaming practices of five school districts, which were originally described in a 1974 study by Birch. The districts involved were: Tacoma (Washington), Richardson (Texas), Plano (Texas), Tucson (Arizona), and Louisville (Kentucky). Survey forms were sent to superintendents of the original six districts of which the above five responded. In the original study, each district displayed unique attributes in its approach to mainstreaming and this remained true in the follow-up study. Four important factors emerged in relation to mainstreaming: (1) teacher preparation; (2) placement and services for students with disabilities; (3) attitudes toward mainstreaming; and (4) cost of mainstreaming. Although some students with mild mental deficiency (MMD) spent nearly 100 percent of their time in the general education setting, each district still maintained self-contained and resource rooms for those students unable to be integrated into the general education setting. Other findings indicated that the cost of segregated classes for students with disabilities in 1994 exceeded the cost of segregated classes in 1974; that it cost less to service MMD students in self-contained classes in 1974 than in general education classes in 1994. There were no favorable statements from any respondents regarding the costs of mainstreaming. (Contains 22 references.) (DB)

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Mainstreaming Revisited: 20 Years Later

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Abstract

This study investigated the changes in the mainstreaming practices of six school districts that were originially reported in the 1974 study by Birch. In the original study, each district displayed unique attributes and this remained true in the follow-up data. A pattern involving four factors emerged in this study. These factors were: teacher preparation, placement/services for students, attitudes toward mainstreaming, and cost factors of mainstreaming. These factors and their implications are discussed.

Mainstreaming Revisited: 20 Years Later

Prior to the decade of the 1970's, self-contained classrooms were the usual delivery for children even with mild disabilities. In the 1970's several court cases steered the direction of public education toward the placement of more students with disabilities into general education settings (Data Research, 1989; Vergason & Anderegg, 1992). One Pennsylvania case decreed that all children, no matter how retarded, were entitled to a free public education (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, 1972). As legal suits were brought against the educational system for fair and equal treatment, congress began to pass laws which gave children throughout the United States the rights that had been gained through these individual cases (Hart, 1981). Finally, P.L. 94-142 was passed (1975) which mandated that children with special education needs are to be educated in the least restrictive environment. This law, based on the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, maintains that the worth of the individual must be protected, regardless of the presence of a disability (Glover & Gary, 1976). Mainstreaming became the term used to describe the primary implication the law had for K-12 schools even though the word is not used in P.L. 94-142.

Definitions of mainstreaming varied according to the philosophy of the school system. In the preface to Mainstreaming: Educable Mentally Retarded Children in Regular Classes (Birch, 1974), Maynard C. Reynolds declared mainstreaming to be "based on the principle of educating most children in the same classrooms and providing special education on the basis of learning needs rather than categories of handicaps" (p. iii). Twenty years ago it was thought that not all exceptional students could be easily integrated with other students in the general education classroom. However, it was anticipated that mainstreaming would prove "to be a way of providing better education for most students through better use of the school facilities and personnel" (Birch, 1974, p. iv). Birch's classic study of mainstreaming for students with mild mental retardation was conducted in six exemplary

school districts of various sizes located in different parts of the United States. It described the qualities of each program.

According to Birch, mainstreaming involved more than requiring students with mild mental handicaps to spend part of the school day in general classes such as physical education, art, music, or vocational classes. Rather, students were to be assigned to the general classroom teacher. The student would then go to the resource room only for essential instruction. General and special educators would share responsibility for instructing students and for the achievement of those students. Birch thought mainstreaming to be a carefully designed, balanced, and individualized teaching arrangement beneficial to students with a variety of learning needs.

Birch's study investigated mainstreaming for students with mild mental retardation. He saw mainstreaming as a valid alternative to self-contained special classes for appropriately selected students and teachers, but he also maintained that mainstreaming was not applicable to all exceptional students. Both mainstreaming and individualization were considered to be desirable concepts but not easily attainable for every student with disabilities. In his 1974 book, Birch reported that the school systems he studied were proving that special education of excellent quality could be arranged for exceptional children in their neighborhood schools and in general class groups.

Purpose and Procedures

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the changes or lack of changes in mainstreaming practiced by the original six school districts reported in the 1974 study by Birch. A form was developed for each district. Specific items were not consistent among the districts because, as Birch reported, each district displayed unique attributes. Each form consisted of items described in the original study. The forms were arranged in two columns. The left column contained the elements of the mainstreaming programs as it

existed in 1974 in each school district. The right column, labeled 1994, was blank. In that column, the respondents were to report the changes, if any, which had occurred in any of the elements listed in the left column.

The forms were sent to the superintendent in each of the original six districts. A cover letter explained the intent of the survey and requested that the survey be completed and returned as soon as possible. Five of the districts responded. The sixth, Kanawha County, West Virginia, chose not to participate in the follow-up study.

Report of the Findings

Demographics

The majority of the original report was composed of the descriptions of the development and status of the mainstreaming effort in six schools districts. Basic information about each school district was reported. In the original study, Birch reported the demographic statistics of the six school districts. A summary of that information is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

School District	Population	Demographics	District SES	Minority Population
Tacoma, WA	154,000	growing	wide SES range	11%
Richardson, TX	49,000	growing	middle class	Not Reported
Plano, TX	18,000	growing	middle class	3.3%
Tucson, AZ	263,000	growing	wide SES range	19%
Louisville, KY	361,000	declining	middle - low	25%
Kanawha County, WV	229,000	stable	middle - low	NR

All districts but one were in relatively large urban areas. The population in all but one of the districts was either growing or stable. The socioeconomic composition of the six districts in the study included all levels. The minority population was not reported for each

district. Those districts for which such figures were reported showed a wide range in terms of percentage of minority students and ethnicity. In reporting ethnicity, the study used the following terms: Blacks, Indians, American Orientals, and Mexican-Americans.

The follow-up study investigated the current demographic information of these same six districts. This information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

School District	Population	Demographics	District SES	Minority Population
Tacoma, WA	184,000	growing	wide SES range	24%
Richardson, TX	76,000	growing	middle class	21%
Plano, TX	142,000	growing	middle class	17%
Tucson, AZ	415,000	growing	wide SES range	37%
Louisville, KY	271,000	declining	middle - low	31%
Kanawha County, WV	207,000	stable	middle - low	7%

As in 1974, the population in all but one of the districts in 1994 was either growing or stable. The socioeconomic composition of the six districts in the study included all levels. The minority population in the districts showed a wide range in terms of the percentage of the total population accounted for by minorities.

Tacoma, WA: 1974-1994

In 1974, Birch reported data on five elements within the mainstreaming program of Tacoma: staff development, program costs, teacher response to mainstreaming, staffing, and the orientation of new teachers. An interesting pattern of stability and change emerged in the intervening 20 years.

In the area of staff development, Tacoma reported a myriad of activities in 1974, designed to support general educators in their efforts to teach students with mental

retardation in their classrooms. Mini-courses, workshops, consultant services and assistance in finding and using materials were all used to support mainstreaming. In 1994, Tacoma continued to offer such services.

In both 1974 and 1994, Tacoma reported that it had been selective in employing teachers who accept the policy of mainstreaming and progressive inclusion. However, in 1994, Tacoma found it difficult to find teachers who were well prepared to work in inclusive classrooms. Further, support for assistance in the area of staff self-evaluation of professional growth had been significantly reduced between 1974 and 1994.

In the area of program costs, Tacoma reported in 1974, that segregated classes for students with mental retardation exceeded the costs of integrated classes. In 1994, because of current funding formulas in Washington, it cost less to serve students in self-contained rooms than it did to integrate students with mental retardation into general classrooms.

The response of general educators to mainstreaming was generally positive in 1974, and it seemed to remain so in 1994. However, not all teachers accepted mainstreaming in 1974, and that remained true in 1994. In 1974, general classroom teachers seldom suggested that students with mental retardation be removed completely from their rooms. But in 1994, because there was a reported increase in the numbers of at-risk students in general classrooms, there was also an increase in the desire by general classroom teachers to use pull-out services to help students with mental retardation. In 1974, it was reported that the Professional Agreements in teacher contracts could have operated to limit mainstreaming. In 1994, it was reported that the Agreements were even stronger and their impact on inclusion was even more limiting.

In both 1974 and 1994, Tacoma recruitment publications highlighted the progressive inclusion approach of the school district. However, in both 1974 and 1994, it was reported that it remained difficult for new teachers (both special and general classroom

teachers) to appreciate the degree to which they were expected to cooperate with other teachers in dealing with students with mental retardation.

In 1994, inclusion continued to be a challenge for Tacoma. Because of the changing characteristics of the general student population, and because new teachers (both special and general classroom teachers) did not seem to have the skills necessary to be effective in inclusive classrooms, it became more difficult to integrate students with disabilities. In 1994, there was actually more support for students with severe disabilities than there was for students with mild disabilities.

Richardson, TX: 1974-1994

In 1974, Birch reported on six elements within the mainstreaming program of Richardson, Texas: assistance to mainstream education, provision of services, teaching positions, supportive positions, funding, and attitudes towards mainstreaming. The present study found that very few changes have occurred in Richardson since 1974.

In 1974, services were provided for all students with mental retardation in the district. Specialists were available to assist the general classroom teacher and supplemental services in the form of helping-teachers, resource teachers, and teacher aides were provided. A commitment was made to provide comprehensive services to all children with mental retardation between the ages of 3 and 21. In 1994, Richardson reported no changes in the services provided to assist general classroom teachers.

In 1974, students with disabilities accounted for approximately 20% of the school population in Richardson. In 1994, students with disabilities accounted for only 11-13% of the school population in Richardson. In both 1974 and 1994, it was reported that special services were available to every student with a disability in Texas. However, in 1974, services were provided for the minimally brain-injured, educable mentally retarded students and trainable mentally retarded students. In 1994, the minimally brain-injured

were no longer served as a separate category and the categories of educable and trainable mentally retarded had been combined into the single category of mentally retarded.

In both 1974 and 1994, Richardson hired teachers for both self-contained classrooms and resource rooms. In addition, Richardson reported the same supportive positions (e.g., counselor, psychologist, etc.) in 1994 as it had in 1974. The funding for special services were reported as being sufficient in 1974. In 1994, the funding for special services was reported as being "adequate."

In the area of attitudes toward mainstreaming, it was reported in 1974 that parents were somewhat negative toward mainstreaming. In 1994, it was reported that many parents seemed to desire increased mainstreaming opportunities. In 1974, about one quarter of the teachers of self-contained classes for students with mental retardation were reluctant to yield their autonomy. In 1994, the respondent for Richardson reported that he/she did not know if there was any change in this attitude among that group of teachers. In 1974, general classroom teachers were willing to try mainstreaming. In 1994, the respondent for Richardson reported that he/she did not know if there was any change in this attitude among that group of teachers.

Full inclusion had not been adopted as the model for the provision of services to students with mental retardation in Richardson, Texas in 1994. Although there seemed to be increasing support for inclusion among parents, students were still being served in both resource and self-contained classrooms. Unfortunately, there was no data in 1994 regarding teacher attitudes towards inclusion in Richardson. The absence of such data leaves many questions about the future of inclusion in this school district.

Plano, TX: 1974-1994

The original report regarding the Plano, Texas school system in 1974 contained six elements: the initiation of the mainstreaming model, instructional arrangements, parental

reaction to mainstreaming, identification and assignment of students to special education, student-teacher ratio, and the orientation of new teachers coming into the system. Although much of the original mainstreaming model continued over the two decades, some changes were reported.

The initial integration of the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR), was provided mostly for those students who were 10-11 years old. In 1994, after twenty years of practice, the district provided mainstreaming for students with cognitive disabilities from Kindergarten through the fifth grade. In 1974, EMR students joined the low reading and math groups for instruction and in 1994, this practice had not changed. However, the number of students with cognitive disabilities assigned to individual classroom teachers had decreased. Special education teachers continued to assist other teachers in planning instruction for these students. In 1974, it was reported that, in the opinion of teachers, EMR students were making satisfactory academic progress and "phenomenal" social gains by their placement in the regular classroom setting. In 1994, that opinion had not changed. Students were grouped by skill level in the general classroom. Both reports judged general teachers to be sophisticated about dealing with EMR students in an integrated setting. However, in 1994, special education teachers continued to provide pull-out instruction for some students. Other instructional arrangements reported in 1994 showed that students with disabilities attended centralized educational programs only when designated by their Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). Usually this placement was short-term and provided for students with significant behavioral concerns who needed therapeutic programming. For those few students who needed a long-term centralized educational program, they did not continue contact with the regular classroom teachers.

In 1974, young children were not mainstreamed into general classrooms. In 1994, 5-year olds with disabilities were integrated into the general education program, whereas 3-4-

year olds with disabilities were serviced in special classes. In 1974, 18-21-year old students were served in sheltered workshop settings. In 1994, these students attended classes on a community college campus or within their local high school campus. A full continuum of services was available on each campus. Vocational education programs have continued throughout the intervening two decades. In addition, in 1994, vocational training included job coaching and career development. The Plano, Texas school district also continued as a regional day school for the deaf.

In 1974, parents met monthly with their children's teachers and made arrangements freely for conferences at other times. They were welcomed as volunteers during the school day. The 1994 data indicated that parents met "as needed" with teachers and continued to volunteer their assistance to teachers.

The identification and assignment of students to special education services showed little change over 20 years. In 1994 it was reported that labels did not drive programming as was stated in the 1974 study. Plano continued to use lead-teachers in connection with placement activities. Whereas in 1974, lead-teachers conducted the majority of the psycho-educational testing of students, in 1994 lead-teachers only conducted criterion-referenced testing. In 1974, it was estimated that lead-teachers spent about 50% of their time in direct instruction. In 1994, lead-teachers spent about 30% of their time in direct teaching of students with special needs. In 1994, educational diagnosticians continued to serve approximately three buildings each, and they continued to join lead-teachers in assessing and preparing educational plans for students, and serving as resource persons for teachers.

Student-teacher ratios were determined by school districts in 1974. Since that time, state regulations have limited the ratio figures for general education teachers and student load for special educators have been based on IEP's and a staffing formula. In 1994, special educators continued to work with students other than those identified with special

needs and to teach in the general classroom. In 1994, new teachers coming into Plano were interviewed to obtain their understanding of mainstreaming practices. This was not necessarily done in 1974.

Tucson, AZ: 1974-1994

The 1974 report for Tucson was unique among the districts that Birch studied. Instead of five or six separate elements, Tucson's data consisted on one element (Organizational Patterns) which contained eight subparts. The 1994 study used this same approach to collect its follow-up data.

The classroom provisions reported in both 1974 and 1994, included self-contained and resource rooms for the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR). In 1994, it was reported that at least 95% of the EMR students were housed on a regular campus and none were institutionalized. Only one segregated school remained in 1994, serving students aged 13-22 who were primarily individuals with more severe disabilities. Resource rooms in 1994 were cross-categorical and team teaching remained in practice.

The label assigned in 1974 for special education was "Adaptive Education." In 1994, the label for special education services was changed to the more generic term of "Exceptional Education." In 1974, it was reported that the term EMR may have included students with IQ's ranging as high as 85. In 1994, it was reported that such students were identified as Learning Disabled.

In 1974, it was reported that 95% of all EMR students spent at least 66% of the school day in general classrooms in the elementary grades. Seventy-five percent of all secondary students were reported to be mainstreamed for more than two-thirds of the school day. In 1994, the respondent for the Tucson school district was reluctant to report such percentage figures due to the lack of accurate data. However, it was reported that Tucson had

attempted to increase inclusion at all levels. Some students were receiving supplemental aids and services and remained in regular classes for 100% of the school day.

In both 1974 and 1994, special educators organized and implemented remedial services on a daily basis. However, in 1994, Tucson also reported the use of "integration specialists" to consult with general classroom teachers.

In 1974, any general classroom teacher accepting a student from the special education program in his/her classroom could send an equal number of general students needing special help to the special educator. By 1994, this practice had been changed. In 1994, sending a general education student to see a special educator was not dependent on accepting a student with disabilities in the general classroom. Nor did sending a student with disabilities to a general classroom mean that a general education student would go to work with a special educator. Finally, it was reported in 1994, that students with disabilities "counted" on the rolls of both general educators and special educators for staffing purposes.

Louisville, KY: 1974-1994

The 1974 study reported six elements in the mainstreaming program for the Jefferson County (Louisville) Public Schools: self-contained classrooms, resource rooms, a combination plan, in-service instruction in mainstreaming practices for general classroom teachers, and in-service instruction for special educators to adapt a cooperative role. There were several changes that occurred in these elements during the intervening 20-year period.

In 1994, the number of students assigned to any self-contained classroom had declined, and the intellectual range for eligibility for placement in self-contained classrooms had decreased by one-third of a standard deviation. No changes were reported regarding service to students who were unable to be integrated into general classes. The educational placement for these students continued to be determined by the IEP.

The 1974 report described several services provided by the resource room model. Specifically, the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) reported to the general classroom teacher, but received instruction from the resource room teacher, and the students spent at least 50% of instruction time in the general classroom. The only change reported in 1994, was that the label for these student was changed to "Mild Mentally Disabled." The services continued to be provided in the same manner as in 1974.

In 1974, support for mainstreaming was reported to be composed of in-service instruction for general classroom teachers to enable them to teach the students with disabilities mainstreamed into their classrooms. Special educators were given in-service instruction to prepare them for the role of cooperative teaching with general classroom teachers. The 1994 follow-up data indicated that in-service for both groups of professionals was based on current trends in education, legal issues, needs as identified by school assessment procedures, and new or innovative practices.

Kanawha County, WV

The representatives of Kanawha County chose not to participate in the follow-up study. As a result, no data were available for analysis.

Discussion

An analysis of the responses provided by the five school districts in this study disclosed some consistent patterns of development over the twenty-year period of mainstreaming practices for students with mental disabilities. Four important factors emerged in relation to mainstreaming: 1) teacher preparation; 2) placement and services for students with disabilities; 3) attitudes toward mainstreaming; and 4) the cost of mainstreaming. These four factors were involved with both a move toward mainstreaming on the part of each of

these districts and the attendant difficulties of mainstreaming that were reported by each of these districts.

The positive aspects of **teacher preparation** that emerged in this study was the inservice provided, as needed, for both general and special educators to meet the demands placed upon them by mainstreaming practices. In addition, the respondents also reported upon the selective employment of teachers who accepted the policy of progressive inclusion. However, difficulty finding teachers who were fully prepared to work in inclusive classrooms was cited as a major issue both in 1974 and in 1994. At both times it was reported that beginning teachers did not fully comprehend the degree that they would be expected to cooperate with other teachers regarding students placed in special education services. Compounding this problem in 1994 was the fact that financial support for professional growth activities had generally been reduced in each of the districts.

These findings are supported by other recent studies (e.g., Wilcox & Wigle, 1995). Many teachers lack the skills needed to individualize instruction for the broad range of individual differences found within the typical school population (Bieck, 1995; Foster, 1986). Most states do not require more than a survey course for an introduction to the characteristics of students with the various disabling conditions (Swartz, 1992). If inclusive classrooms are going to succeed, there will need to be adequate preparation for preservice professionals and continuous staff development for inservice professionals to include ongoing coaching and support (Rodriguez & Tompkins, 1994).

The respondents in this study generally used noncategorical language when describing their mainstreaming efforts. As a result, the data regarding **placement and services** in 1994 were difficult to compare to those of 1974. Some schools combined Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) and Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) into one category labeled Mildly Mentally Disabled (MMD). In 1994, more students were labeled as

Learning Disabled and hence were more likely to be mainstreamed. The age range of students served in the category of MMD increased over the years. These students continued to join students in the general education classroom for mathematics and reading instruction, according to their individual skill level.

The time some MMD students spent in the general education setting had increased to nearly 100% of the school day by 1994. However, since 1974, mainstreaming was reported as becoming more difficult for MMD students because a) special and general educators did not have the skills necessary to conduct inclusionary classroom settings, and b) the characteristics of general education students had also changed since 1974. As a result, each of the districts in this study reported the existence of self-contained and resource rooms for those students who were unable to be integrated into the general education setting.

Lombardo and Lombardo (1987) have studied teachers' **attitudes toward mainstreaming** in relation to job satisfaction. They found that generally job satisfaction seems to vary according to a teacher's experience with mainstreaming. However, they also found that teachers at the high school level experience lower job satisfaction in inclusive settings than those working in inclusive settings in middle or elementary schools.

The present study found that parental desire for inclusionary practices for their children had increased during the last 20 years. However, teacher attitudes toward mainstreaming did not parallel that of parental attitudes. Some districts reported that not all of their teachers accepted inclusionary practices. Other districts reported that professional agreements for teacher contracts had stronger limitations for inclusionary practices contained in them in 1994 than they had in 1974.

These findings are reflective of a larger debate currently being conducted among parents and professionals. On one side of the debate are those who believe that a full array of

service options should be available to students with disabilities. They believe in integration in general education classrooms whenever possible, but they also believe that other services, even separate schooling may be necessary (Council for Children with Behavior Disorders, 1988; Keogh, 1988; Morsink & Lenk, 1992; Smith & Bassett, 1991). On the other side of the issue are those who believe that all students should receive their education exclusively in the general education classroom with their age-mates, and that special and general education are unnecessary dual systems (ARC, 1992; CASE, 1993; NASBE, 1992; Sailor, 1991; Snell, 1988). Until all of the participants in this debate can arrive at a reasonable compromise position, the lack of agreement among parents, among teachers, and between parents and teachers over inclusionary practices will continue to cloud the efforts to meet the needs of all students.

The present study found that the cost of segregated classes for students with disabilities in 1994 exceeded the cost of segregated classes for students with disabilities in 1974. It was also reported that it cost less to service MMD students in self-contained rooms in 1974 than it cost to service MMD students in general education classrooms in 1994. There were no favorable statements from any of the respondents in this study regarding the **costs of mainstreaming**.

The accounts of cost efficiency in recent literature echo these findings. Cost effectiveness reported for inclusion shows mixed results (Mawdsley, 1995). One comparison of the costs for instruction, administration, transportation, and staff development in inclusive settings, with the costs of traditional special education services found neither approach to be more cost-effective than the other (Roahrig, 1995). Other studies have indicated that costs are a factor to be seriously considered when planning inclusionary programs (McCarthy, 1993; McCormick & First, 1994; McLaughlin & Warren, 1994). There are those who might maintain that states and schools are adopting

inclusionary practices to save money. However, such savings are unlikely. In addition, some inclusionary practices may prove to be costly to the children with special needs in terms of quality of services rendered to them (Shanker, 1995). It seems that whether the practice of full inclusion will prove to be cost effective is yet to be determined.

Conclusion

It should be emphasized that to determine that something should be done without reflecting on past attempts to do it, is to overlook some lessons that should inform our present-day efforts. As indicated by the present study, there are entrenched attitudes, policies and educational structures that work against achieving more inclusionary school environments. In addition, because of a lack of appropriate preparation, many educators do not know how to adapt and modify the curriculum and instructional programs to meet diverse student needs, deal with behavioral difficulties and/or provide the specialized tools, techniques, and supports that some students will need to be successful in the mainstream. If we are to move toward more inclusive environments, then we need to learn from our past attempts to do so. In this way, we may come to succeed where it is possible, avoid repeating past mistakes, and accept that inclusion may never be total.

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